

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAIGON 03994 011149Z

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4544

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 3994

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJ: DEBATE IN THE SENATE ON CONDUCT OF THE WAR

REFS: (A) SAIGON 3774, (B) SAIGON 3864

1. FOLLOWING IS REPORT MINISTER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BENNETT JUST
MADE TO ME ON A SECOND MEETING WITH SENATE PRESIDENT TRAN VAN LAM:

2. BEGIN TEXT:

1. SENATE PRESIDENT LAM ASKED ME TO CALL THIS NOON (APR 1)
TO TELL ME OF THE RESULT OF HIS TALKS WITH FELLOW SENATORS CONCERNING
THE FORTHCOMING DEBATE ON THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR. LAM TOLD ME THAT
AS A RESULT OF CONSULTATIONS SUNDAY AND MONDAY HE BELIEVES THAT THE
SENATE, INCLUDING MOST OF THE OPPOSITION, WILL APPROACH THE DEBATE
IN A CONSTRUCTIVE WAY. IN HIS TALKS WITH THE SENATORS, LAM STRESSED
THE NEED FOR U.S. SUPPORT FOR SVN AND HIS VIEW THAT PROSPECTS FOR
A FAVORABLE VOTE IN THE CONGRESS ON THE SUPPLEMENTAL ARE BETTER
NOW THAN THEY HAD BEEN WHEN HE WAS IN WASHINGTON. IN THE DEBATE
THE SENATORS WILL STRESS APPEALS TO THE U.S. FOR HELP IN THE PRESENT
SITUATION.

THEY WILL ALSO DISCUSS THE NEED FOR A NEW GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL
UNITY, BUT WITHOUT SPECIFICS AND WITHOUT ANY SUGGESTION THAT
PRESIDENT THIEU MUST RESIGN. THE POINT WILL BE MADE THAT PSYCHO-
LOGICALLY WHAT IS NEEDED IS A NEW GOVERNMENT WITH NEW FACES TO
IMPRESS ON THE PEOPLE THAT THERE IS NEW LEADERSHIP THAT CAN SEE
THEM THROUGH THE CRISIS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 SAIGON 03994 011149Z

2. LAM SAID THAT AT THE END OF THE DEBATE A RESOLUTION INCORPORATING THESE IDEAS, COINED IN TERMS WHICH ARE INTENDED TO BE POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE, WILL BE PASSED. HE SAID THAT THERE WILL OF COURSE BE CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT BY OPPOSITION SENATORS, BUT HE DID NOT EXPECT ANY OF THEM WILL CALL FOR REPLACEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT, EXCEPT VU VAN MAU WHO HAS BEEN CALLING FOR THIEU'S RESIGNATION AT LEAST SINCE 1972.

3. BECAUSE OF THE INTENSE INTEREST IN THE SENATE ON THIS SUBJECT LAM HAS HAD TO CHANGE HIS EARLIER PLAN TO POSTPONE THE DEBATE UNTIL FRIDAY. THE DEBATE WILL BE ITEM NO. 4 ON THE AGENDA OF THE SENATE SESSION WHICH BEGINS TOMORROW, WEDNESDAY, APR 2. LAM THINKS IT LIKELY THAT THE SENATORS WILL MOVE TO GIVE PRIORITY OVER THE OTHER THREE ITEMS TO DEBATE ON THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR. HOWEVER, HE REASSURED ME MORE THAN ONCE THAT HE FELT THAT THE DEBATE WOULD BE CONSTRUCTIVE AND HELPFUL FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW AS WELL AS VIETNAM'S.

4. COMMENT: LAM DID NOT THINK THE RESOLUTION WOULD INCLUDE A RECOMMENDATION THAT THE PRIME MINISTER BE A CIVILIAN; BUT HE INDICATED THAT THIS WAS THE GENERAL FEELING OF THE SENATORS. LAM ALSO TOLD ME THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES WERE HOPING FOR SOME U.S. ACTION WHICH WOULD SAVE SVN IN THIS CRISIS. HE SAID HE KNEW IT WAS TOO MUCH TO ASK FOR THE B-52'S, BUT HE HOPED THE U.S. MIGHT TELL HANOI THAT THEY COULD GO JUST SO FAR AS THEY HAVE GONE AND NO FARTHER. THIS, HE SAID, WOULD PROVIDE A TREMENDOUS BOOST TO THE MORALE OF THE SOUTH. LAM ALSO COMMENTED SEVERAL TIMES THAT IN DISCUSSIONS OF A NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT THERE WAS NO INTENTION TO INFRINGE ON THE ROLE OF THE ARMY. THE ARMY MUST BE THE "BACKBONE" OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT. HIS FINAL COMMENT WAS THAT EVERYTHING MUST BE MANAGED IN A CONSTITUTIONAL FASHION. TODAY IS THE 8TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE VIETNAMESE CONSTITUTION, AND HE AS PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE IS MAKING A PUBLIC STATEMENT COMMEMORATING THE OCCASION. END TEXT

3. I THINK THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THE SENATE DEBATE RATHER THAN BEING DIVISIVE MIGHT MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO A GREATER SPIRIT OF NATIONAL UNITY.
MARTIN

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